(c) As per the Report on National Survey on Blindness and Visual Outcomes after Cataract Surgery, individuals residing in the rural areas had significantly higher rates of blindness and low vision compared to their counterparts staying in the urban areas. Separate data in respect of cases of blindness in tribal areas is not available under NPCB.

(d) The following strategies have been planned by Government to combat blindness:-

1. Setting up of State/District Health Societies (NPCB) in States/UTs;
2. Providing Eye care facilities to the needy people at Primary, Secondary and Tertiary levels through Primary Health Centres, District Hospitals, Medical Colleges and Regional Institutes of Ophthalmology;
3. Strengthening of Eye Banks in Government/Voluntary Sector;
4. Financial support to NGOs for strengthening existing infrastructure for Eye care.
5. Organizing Eye Donation Fortnight from 25th August to 8th September every year to promote eye donation;
6. Screening of school children for detection of refractive errors and providing free spectacles to poor children;
7. Training to Eye Surgeons from Government Hospitals and Medical Colleges for quality eye care;
8. Intensification of IEC activities to create awareness about eye care activities;
9. Support for construction of dedicated Eye Wards and Eye Operation Theatres in NE States and few other States;
10. Setting up of Mobile Ophthalmic Units linked with Tele-Ophthalmology Network in NE States and other hilly States;
11. Support to Non-Governmental Organizations for cataract and other eye diseases like diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma management, childhood blindness, etc.;
12. Involvement of private practitioners for management of eye diseases.

**Disease due to silica dust**

852. SHRI VIJAY JAWAHARLAL DARDA: Will the Minister of HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Bhil, Bhilala tribals are falling prey to incurable diseases after exposure to silica dust by quartz crushing units in Gujarat;

(b) if so, whether any survey has been conducted in the States like Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, etc. to know the magnitude of this on going problem;

(c) whether National Human Rights Commission and the Supreme Court are also seized of the matter; and

(d) what is the holistic and long-term planning of Government to effectively deal with this incurable but preventable disease?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE (SHRIMATI PANABAKA LAKSHMI): (a) As per Indian Council of Medical Research the workers exposed to silica

dust for sufficient duration and dose are likely to develop silicosis. A study was carried out by the National Institute of Occupational Health (NIOH), Ahmedabad among the workers of stone crushing units of Godhara, Gujarat. It was noted that the workers belonged to the garasiya, nayak, rathava, damor, bhabhor etc. communities. The Council, however does not have information on the Bhill, Bhilala tribals working in quartz crushing units.

(b) The NIOH has carried out some studies in the different industries involving silica dust exposure in the States of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh and the prevalence of silicosis found is as follows:

| Industry | Place | Prevalence of Silicosis |
|---|---|---|
| Slate pencil (N = 593) (1980)* | Mandsaur, M.P. | 54.7 |
| Ceramic (N=292) (1987)* | Thangadh, Gujarat | 15.1 |
| Agate (N=468) (2000)* | Khambhat, Gujarat | 29.1 |
| Stone crushing (N=218) (2001)* | Godhara, Gujarat | 44.9 |
| Slate pencil (N=l 94) (2005)* | Mandsaur, M.P. | 46.9 |

N=Number of subjects, *Year of the study

(c) Yes, Sir.

(d) The National Institute of Occupational Health, Ahmedabad has developed control devices for the agate grinding industry and stone crushing industry. The NIOH is also conducting workship at Ahmedabad, Kolkata and Bangalore to provide basic concept of occupational health and hygiene to medical officers/hygienist to make them competent in the detection, diagnosis, treatment and management of silicosis.

**Blind population**

853. SHRI VIJAY JAWAHARLAL DARDA: Will the Minister of HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE be pleased to state:

(a) whether according to the Health Ministry report, there are 15.6 lakh blind people in Uttar Pradesh and Delhi and Andhra Pradesh are close behind with 15.5 lakh and 10 lakh cases respectively;

(b) if so, what is the position of other States;

(c) whether any concrete steps and measures in this regard have been worked out by his Ministry;

(d) if so, the details thereof; and

(e) what is the total blind population in the country at present?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE (SHRIMATI PANABAKA LAKSHMI): (a) to (e) As per the Survey 2001-04, conducted under the National